

Introduction

We have all heard time and again that "patience is a virtue." And there can be no doubt that it is. But it is quite remarkable that it is a virtue in very short supply in this world. One place it surely should not be in short supply is in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. I am hopeful this morning that as a result of our consideration of this aspect of the fruit of the Spirit that it will increase and abound in our lives.

[Read text and Pray]

Patience is defined by dictionary.com as "the quality of being patient, as the bearing of provocation, annoyance, misfortune, or pain, without complaint, loss of temper, irritation, or the like." It is "an ability or willingness to suppress restlessness or annoyance when confronted with delay." To grasp deeply the meaning of patience, we need to look at the greatest display of it. The greatest display of patience is the one true God who is profoundly patient. There is no greater patience than his. So that is where we will start this morning. First, we will explore God's patience with us. Then we will turn to our patience with God, and finally we will consider our patience with people.

I. God's Patience with Us.

Psalm 130 flows from the heart of a person who is in distress. They find themselves in a trial of soul such as is felt by those in deep depression. If you find yourself in depression, Psalm 130 is a place you should go and just read the psalm back to God. The psalmist finds himself in the depths. And yet he is hopeful. In fact, the psalm concludes with a plea to Israel as a whole to put her hope in the Lord.

The psalmist draws attention to the compelling reason to hope in the Lord even when you are in the midst of the depths. The reason is that God is patient. Now the word patient does not appear in the text, but the essence of divine patience is very clear. With God there is forgiveness of sins. So far as I can tell, there is one thing about which the Bible says God is slow. He is NOT slow about his promises, but he IS SLOW TO ANGER. This is part of his covenant identity. Moses sought to see the glory of the Lord. The Lord placed him in the cleft of the rock and passed by and proclaimed the Name of the Lord. He proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, SLOW TO ANGER, and abounding in STEADFAST LOVE and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, FORGIVING INIQUITY and TRANSGRESSIONS and SIN." Patience is synonymous with the forgiveness of sin. To forgive is to be slow to anger and to exercise patience. Patience is also demonstrated in the very concept of steadfast love. Steadfast love, enduring love is patient love. God is patient. He is infinitely patient.

We do not often think of the patience of God. But at least for a few moments let us give intensive thought to the grandeur of the patience of God. Think of the patience of God in the Old Testament. He was patient with Abraham who was impatient with him. The Lord did not give up on Abraham even when he tried to help God out by involving himself with Hagar. The Lord was patient with the brothers of Joseph. He was patient in the wilderness wanderings of the Israelites. Moses destroyed the tablets and God gave some more.

He was patient with Asaph who wrote Psalm 73. Remember Asaph. He basically said of the Lord, "What's the use of my serving him? The wicked seem to have no troubles. They are at ease and

they increase in riches. In vain have I kept my heart clean." Likewise Jeremiah asked the Lord (12:1), "Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all who are treacherous thrive?" Well, the Lord was patient with Asaph and Jeremiah. But why is it that the wicked seem to thrive? Is not God also being patient with them? By continuing to pour out his blessings on them, is he not offering them additional time and reason to turn to him and repent?

Did God not exercise patience with the Ninevites? Sure, he sent Jonah to preach of coming destruction. It was a warning. They repented and God relented. It made Jonah mad. He wanted to see them burn. Jonah said to the Lord, "Is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, SLOW TO ANGER, and relenting from disaster."

And how about the New Testament? Recall how Jesus sent messengers ahead of him into a village in Samaria to prepare for his coming. The citizens of that town would not receive him since his face was set toward Jerusalem. James and John were like, "Lord, shall we call down fire from heaven to torch them?" Jesus rebuked them. He did not come to torch people at this time. He was still in a posture of patience.

His disciples all tried the patience of Jesus. Peter denied Christ, but Jesus was tender toward him. And then there was Paul. Here was a man set on destroying the church of the Lord. But the Lord Jesus called Paul to himself as a chosen vessel to carry his name to the Gentiles. Paul testified to Timothy, "I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent." Why didn't the Lord just let Paul persecute him to his death? Paul explained, "I received mercy for this reason, that in me the foremost [sinner], Jesus Christ might display HIS PERFECT PATIENCE as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life" (1 Timothy 1:13-16).

In fact God's patience is the reason Jesus has not yet returned in fulfillment of his promise. Peter foretold that in the last days scoffers will arise asking where is the promise of his coming. They will say, "Everything just keeps on going like it always has." But Peter warns his brothers and sisters in the Lord: "Do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance." The fact that Christ has not yet returned does not demonstrate a slowness of God to keep his promise. It does not mean he does not keep his promise. No, his seeming delay is because of his patience. All his people are not yet saved.

You who believe in Christ, you who have come to trust in him, why? Why do you believe? I am not asking what are the reasons that substantiate your belief. I am asking what is the cause of your faith? Why is it that you believe in Christ rather than not believing in Christ? It is ultimately because God has had mercy on you. He is slow to anger. How many times have you and I pushed his patience to the limit? And yet he waited. And finally HE brought US to faith. How much scoffing did he endure? How much resistance did he put up with? How much darkness in our thinking did he bear with? But he did. If you believe, it is because he is patient toward you.

And what of those in this very room this morning who do not yet believe in Christ? Why do you think you are still alive? Why do you have breath? Why has God put up with your doubts and your determination to rule your own life? Why does he withstand your mockery of his name, your blasphemies, your deep dive into immorality? Why does he pour good things into your life? Why do you think you have life as good as you do? It is because God is mercifully patient toward you! Every

day he gives you is yet one more day for the opportunity to turn from sin and trust in him. He is giving you another moment to realize with the psalmist from Psalm 130 that "should the Lord mark iniquities, [no one] could stand, that there is forgiveness with the Lord that he may be feared." He is giving you one more opportunity to stop running away from him and turn to him and wait for him, to hope in him, to trust in him.

Once more you may hear the gospel call. Jesus died for sinners, to reconcile men with God. All who will turn away from themselves and unto Christ in faith will be saved from the wrath of God. They will be declared righteous. They will be adopted into the family of God. They will receive the gift which the patience of God is all about. He is patient toward you. Will you reverence him? Will you trust him? Take advantage of his patience because there is an expiration date. A day is coming when he will wait no longer. No one knows what a day may bring forth. Today is the day for your salvation. Do not wait any longer.

Geoff Thomas correctly states, "Here is one of the most wonderful attributes of the Creator and Sustainer of the whole universe, that he is an extraordinarily patient God, and every Christian who gives this a moment's thought is mighty glad that this is so. He is incomparable in his patience. ... He bears with us; how long did he wait for your repentance and faith in him? He waits for our return as prodigals from the far country. He is slow to anger. He is long-suffering. He waits and waits in order to be gracious to us."

Thomas tells of a famous Victorian atheist Charles Bradlaugh who would give lectures on atheism all over England. His lectures always ended with a challenge not to the attenders but to God himself. Removing a stop-watch from his pocket, he would scoff at the God he rejected: "If you exist then smite me dead in the next minute." After the passing of 60 seconds, he would say to his audience, "What sort of God is this who can't smite me down for my anti-god beliefs?" Many, many people in our day are just as arrogant in their living. As Thomas states, "those men live and move and have their being in God and their breath is in his hands and he is showing them wonderful patience and he heaps his blessings on their lives. He gives them many, many opportunities to fall before him and serve him in new life. This is the incomparable patience of God. He shows all manner of patience to the people whose sin he hates, to those he knows and to those who provoke him." The reason why God does not smite even this man within a 60 second period has nothing to do with the capability of God but everything to do with the patience of God. God is gloriously patient with us. It should fill our hearts with awe and wonder.

Next, let's turn to ...

II. Our Patience with God.

God is oh so patient with us. Let's ponder the necessity for us to be patient with God. We can go back for a moment to Psalm 130. Here, remember, the psalmist was in the depths of despair. But calling to mind the patience of God—that he is willing to forgive sins, that he will have mercy to those who cry out to him—calling this to mind, what does he do? What he does is resolve to WAIT on the Lord. He says, "I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; my soul waits for the Lord." In other words, he is going to hold on and trust God. This is his patience with God. He has become stabilized by who the Lord is and what he has said. And although the psalmist is in the depths, he will wait; he will trust; he will not allow his soul to complain or become irritated. Rather he will hope. Hope is an expression of patience.

You and I have problems waiting on God at a stop light, in a traffic jam, or on the lake watching a bobber. We have problems waiting on God to guide and direct our lives. Our circumstances are a

bit uncomfortable and we are crying out for God to act RIGHT NOW to improve our comfort, to supply our desire, to take us out of the storm. Clearly, there is a connection between peace and patience. Peace with God is the fertile soil out of which grow the beautiful flowers of patience. But patience says to God what the psalmist says here. It's been put to music by the Gettys and Jordan Kauflin, "I will wait for you! I will wait for you through the storm and through the night. I will wait for you, surely wait for you; for your love is my delight."

God works in mysterious ways his wonders to perform as he uses all our circumstances to mold and shape his people into the likeness of Christ. This is our good. It is good that we encounter rough patches. It is good for us to have to wait. It is then that our resolve to trust God and his timing is put to the test and proven. It is then that our character is fashioned to be more than a design and becomes in us an actuality.

I wanted to say this last week in the context of peace, but I will say it this week in the context of patience. Romans 5:1-2 is striking. "Therefore since we have been justified by faith we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ. ... We rejoice in hope of the glory of God." But that is not all we rejoice in. Verse 3 says, "More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance (endurance may also be known as patience), and endurance produces character, and character hope."

Patience with God in his sovereign work is the needed response on our part for the work of God to be completed in us which results in our taking on the character of Jesus. Charles Spurgeon set forth a description of a weather-beaten sailor back in the day. "The man who is at home on the sea," he says, has "a bronze face and mahogany-coloured flesh, he looks as tough as heart of oak, and as hardy as if he were made of iron." How did the man become that way? Not by sitting on the beach! He came to look that way by experiencing life at sea in all kinds of winds and weather. Says Spurgeon, he became that way, "By doing business in great waters. He could not have become a hardy seaman by tarrying on shore."

Even so, it is in the school of life that God works on us and in us through all kinds of spiritual weather. In real life we learn what we cannot through reading and studying. Our hearts are transformed; our minds are renewed; our habits are changed; our works become good works through trial and challenge. We grow stronger through resistance. We must be convinced with Paul that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. Such a conviction will feed a resolve to wait on the Lord.

Now finally this morning, we turn to consider ...

III. Our Patience with People.

As we survey the 130th psalm, we will notice that as the writer concludes the song, he turns his attention in a third direction. Previously he has emphasized the patience of God by pleading for his ear and taking consolation in his willingness to forgive. Next he expresses his own patience with God, so-to-speak, by announcing his resolve to wait on the Lord and hope in his word, in his promises. Now in verse 7, his focus turns outward to other people. He addresses the people of the Lord and urges them to have patience with the Lord as well—to hope in the Lord too. Will they listen? Will they heed his plea? He will have to be patient with them to see.

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience. The Holy Spirit is at work in the people of God to work these character qualities out in our lives. Patience as a character quality certainly includes a

patient demeanor when it comes to God's promises and God's providential working. But it also assuredly includes a patient demeanor towards other people.

Patience is needed every single day with other people. I need it as much as anyone. The other night after Learning and Leaning, Melissa and I went to fill her car with gasoline. As I was exiting the pump area, I came to a stop sign, and I stopped. Oncoming traffic does NOT have a stop sign. But here comes a car. And they stop. Why? I do not know. But they do. I sit there waiting for them to go, but they don't go. They begin waving at me to go as though they were the ones who had a stop sign. I sit there murmuring to Melissa about what this person is thinking. I am not moving. I have a stop sign. But then they resort to flashing their lights at me. There they are kinda in my way, and they want me to pull out. And they're not supposed to be pulling in where I am pulling from. It is a one-way exit. I'm like being tested as to my patience. Finally, I pull out and I have to admit I did it with a little bit of an attitude. And that's just one little instance for me this week.

I am sure you have had yours as well. Sometimes our patience is tested in big ways and sometimes in ways that are practically insignificant. But as Christians walk by the Spirit, patience will manifest itself more and more amazingly in our lives. And we should strive for it, in the power of the Spirit, of course.

Love is patient (1 Corinthians 13:4). Patience lives peaceably with all (Romans 12:18). Not only are we told that patience is fruit of the Spirit in Galatians, in Ephesians Paul says that to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which we have been called, we must be humble, gentle, and PATIENT, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:1-3). To the Colossians, he writes, "Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and PATIENCE, bearing with one another, and if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other, as the Lord has forgiven you, so you must also forgive." 1 Thessalonians 5:14 is where Paul gives this exhortation: "And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be PATIENT with them all." James urges that we be like the Lord in his patience, that we "be quick to hear, slow to speak, and SLOW to ANGER (1:19).

To demonstrate that we must be patient with one another Jesus gave us the parable of the unforgiving servant. That's the one in which a servant owed his master far more than he would ever be able to repay, but he pleaded for PATIENCE and got it; he received FORGIVENESS. And yet he went out and found a fellow servant who owed him a little. He demanded repayment. The fellow servant did what the other had done. He asked for PATIENCE but the forgiven servant refused to forgive him. The master, finding out, withdrew his forgiveness and sent the first servant to jail.

Our patience is tried in a variety of ways. There are those who purposefully mistreat us, even persecute us. Knowing God is patient to sinners and faithful to his word, we wait on the Lord. Knowing that God will take care of justice, we do not retaliate but we pray for God's grace for them. There are also loved ones who sin against us. We remember, however, how we have sinned against God. We are mindful that our sin against him is incalculable and incomparable to the measly way in which others sin against us. As God is slow to anger, by God's Spirit we respond the same way and forgive those who seek it.

Our patience is also tested by the shortcomings, weaknesses, and failures of others. Our lives are constantly barraged by the inconvenient, disappointing, and challenging actions of other people that

are irritating. There is the guy in the car ahead of you. The light has been green for a coon's age, but he is going nowhere. A neighbor is inconsiderate. An accountability partner fails. People annoy with idiosyncratic habits. Impatience in these kinds of situations is generally rooted in pride. Every single day of your life, you, no doubt, hear persons making sneering remarks about others. You may even be the one who does it. "How stupid! How inept! How awkward! How unbelievable that so-and-so is doing that or thinking that!" Those kinds of remarks reveal a feeling of superiority. We can't believe someone is behaving so foolishly, so irritatingly, so hatefully because we are so much smarter and more responsible and more considerate than that.

It may be true. We may be smarter. We may be more thoughtful. We may be more responsible. But we must remember this. What makes us any different than anyone else? Where did you get your smarts from? Where did you get your high ideals from? Where did you get your good habits from? Paul provides the needed understanding that addresses such prideful impatience in 1 Corinthians 4:7. He asks, "What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?"

If you have any sense at all, where did it come from? All we are is what we have received from God. Whenever we scoff at others and are impatient with them, it is as though we think that there is something better about us that we ourselves have achieved or become on our own. We might as well be patting ourselves on our backs for how wonderful we are in and of ourselves. Being patient with others begins with the recognition that who and what we are is all of grace. Whatever superiority we may think we have—or even actually have—it is because of the grace and patience of God. We have every reason to bear with others. Why look at how God has borne so patiently with us!

Conclusion

Pastor Geoffrey Thomas in thinking on the patience of God, said this:

The foundation of all my comfort is that God is all grace, and God is all patience. He will not end this world until all his people are safely gathered in, free from sorrow and free from sin. He is patient towards the world even when men abuse that patience and take out stop-watches and challenge him to kill them, or use that patience to mock, and rebel and blaspheme. He is patient towards me, when he has seen me on many occasions behave in such a sub-Christian way. I am mighty glad that I can still call him 'Father' and depend on him to be with me and keep me today and every tomorrow until the very end.

The patience of God is a glorious thing. It moves us to awe and gratitude and praise. But we ourselves are so frequently averse to showing that same patience with others or even him. May God humble us to the extent that we will walk by the Spirit and patience will be abundantly produced in our lives.